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The Function of Religion in Relating
Specific and Ultimate Objectives
in Socio-Economic Conflict

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY
SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DE-
GREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

1937

BY

OREN HULING BAKER

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THE FUNCTION OF RELIGION IN RELATING SPECIFIC AND ULTIMATE OBJECTIVES IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONFLICT

OREN HULING BAKER

THE investigation undertaken in this study begins by recognizing human living as a process of functioning which is motivated by the desire for security and the quest for fulfilment. To attain these ends, individuals and groups organize environment in the form of interests which represent their choices of satisfying purposes. By virtue of the juxtaposition of these interests in a common physical and social milieu, and by virtue of the tendency of human living to expand its functioning, situations of conflict arise. Through reference to the method which opposing interests may adopt in seeking an adjustment of their differences, it is possible to discriminate between two general types of conflict. When the opposing interests are so organized that their activities may interpenetrate and produce, through co-operative effort, a new and more inclusive order of interests, the conflict becomes constructive in character. When conditions of fixation or status are such as to prevent interpenetration, resulting in the aloofness of the interests and in tendencies toward mutual frustration, the conflict is destructive.

Since the organization of interests implies the existence of ends in view, it is observed that the control of situations of conflict for constructive outcomes involves the operation of an ultimate objective representing the most inclusive order of possibility and supplying thereby normative guidance for the re-shaping of all specific objectives. Analysis of socio-economic conflict as it develops under the individualist economy exhibits the tendency of economic interests to concentrate attention upon immediate ends and to ignore the rightful claims of other interests with the result of precipitating destructive conflict. In this context, the function of religion emerges in terms of the significance of an ultimate objective capable of directing a re-ordering of opposing interests in such a way as to bring about an ever-increasing realization of human good through the co-operative activities of all interests. This study, then, assumes the character of an inquiry concerning the function of religion in infusing the non-temporal generality of conceptual thought



into situations of socio-economic conflict whose characteristic, when uncontrolled, involves a particularity which tends toward costly frustration and destructiveness. The kind of religion relevant to the performance of this task flows from the essential positions of the philosophy of organism, and mediates its activities through the concepts of meaning and value.

The more important positions attained through the investigation are embodied in the formulations which follow.

First, the emergence in recent times of the possibility of a world community increasingly compels an orientation of human thought toward an inclusive re-ordering of human activities. Events in the objective world, due to the multiplication and diversification of interests, have left empty of relevancy many of the ideas which controlled human relations during the period of the previous culture. In economic affairs, the dominant philosophy of individualism has been undermined by the activities which eventuated through the utilization of machinery and the organization incident to mass production. This in turn has given rise to an increasing interdependence of the processes of human living. By virtue of this interdependence, the philosophy of organism acquires its validity with respect to the economic problem. There exists, then, in the actual world an implicit objective meaning which represents a supersession of the subjective ideas induced by the organized activities of an older culture. Consequently, if the control of modern economic activities is to be established in consonance with the realities, there is required a process of conceptualization which will bring the subjective realm of human living into accord with existing conditions in the objective world.

The important omission in the theory which gives sanction to the present economic system is seen in its failure to consider the meaning implicit in the total activity of the human community where it operates. In other words, the fallacy of individualism in its emphasis upon the independence of particular interests is patent in its assumptions with respect to the neutrality of the whole. Examination of modern industrial enterprise both with regard to its capacity to produce goods and with regard to its extraordinary liability to derangement discloses an inter-relatedness of economic factors that is beyond question. Likewise in the market where goods are exchanged, a continuous interaction of productive and consumptive operations is basic to any sound ordering of affairs. Nevertheless, the significance of this interdependence is only vaguely discerned, with the result of maladjustment, disruptive

conflict and distressing crisis. It becomes increasingly apparent that nothing short of an understanding of the meaning of events which are taking place before men's eyes, and an orientation of human purposes with respect to the possibility of higher values will suffice if adequate control is to be established. The first function of religion, therefore, is to make explicit the meaning of the increasing interdependence of human living and seek to develop thereby a bond of union by which men may progressively participate in the activities of each other through devotion to the supreme objective of all human living. In the exercise of this function, religion may provide the conditions under which economic activities may pass from any given state of organization into an ever-growing community of possibility for human good.

Second, analysis of situations of socio-economic conflict leads us to the discovery that their constructive re-organization involves a process by which the interpenetration of opposing interests may take place. This we may call the internalization of conflict, or that process of exchange of viewpoints by which the aims and purposes of the persons connected with one interest may enter into a relation of mutuality with the aims and purposes of the persons connected with an opposing interest. In this context, a basic factor is disclosed in the tendency of individuals and groups to organize environment and to defend the security of the resulting interests by developing an external differentiation, or status, which excludes other interests. While status has a certain legitimacy as a characteristic of any organized interest, it becomes a barrier to the constructive resolution of conflict when it assumes a rigidity which prevents the mutual interpenetration of the activities of opposing groups. Perhaps at no point is the self-defeating particularity of the uncontrolled specific objective more evident than in the fixation which it finally attains in the acquisition of status. Beginning in association with the motive of functioning to live, it drives men on beyond the legitimate goal of security in quest for power which will implement their functioning on an ever-expanding scale. Under the system which affirms equality of opportunity for all but which is unable to provide it, this hungry individualism serves a few magnificently and blocks the way of many others who seek an economic footing that will give them a minimum of security. But this is not all. It announces its right to act in this way and calls as its witness the sanctions of law and order established by the traditional culture. Moreover, when this assertion of right is made in the name of property, it is only covertly disputed, because the whole of society, as the result of long habituation,

acknowledges it. Thus under the protection of status the specific objective moves men on until the crack of doom is heard in a crisis which brings to light its self-contradictory and self-defeating nature. In consequence, the dissolution of status, required by creative reconstruction, depends upon infusing into situations of conflict that highest and surest generality which affirms that particular human purposes are only truly served as they are transformed by loyalty to a cause which is inclusive of the purposes of all and worthy of the devotion of all men.

This is a function which has been performed in some degree by all of the great religions. Jesus, Mahomet and Buddha are perhaps the classical examples of how individuals of high sensitivity may internalize conflicting forces in a given age and environment, bring them to a creative resolution and emerge with the seal of authority upon their proposals for the reconstruction of human living. This distinctive activity is alive in the world today and exhibiting its genius in many places, notably in the work of M. K. Gandhi and Toyohiko Kagawa. Thus the function of religion in the internalization of socio-economic conflict becomes paramount for three reasons. First, religion emphasizes the importance of an inclusive community whose realization is obstructed by exclusive and artificial status. Second, religion is concerned with the release of individuality by which the growth of community, through diversification and integration, is promoted. Third, the potential pervasiveness of religion, giving it a field of operations co-extensive with that of the economic order, places upon it responsibility for promoting the internalization of conflict by the members of the entire community. In short, religion of the right kind has the capacity to dissolve status and free individuality on a scale commensurate with the requirements of the economic problem. This is its second function.

Third, with the extension of the issues of socio-economic conflict to the dimensions of the total community, the question arises as to the function of religion in preparing individuals and groups for creative participation in the re-shaping of economic life. The most important contribution which religion may make in this connection comes through worship, for the basic concern of worship is the cultivation of loyalty to an objective viewed as "supremely worthful for all human living." The validity of this approach to the control of economic affairs resides in the fact that men, by experience, have found their highest security and fulfilment of purposes through loyalty to the members of their group. But since the relations of men to one another are qualified by their relations with nature, the controlling objective must apply to

loyalty in these relations also. The supreme objective, then, becomes that synthesis of man's relations with nature and with his fellow-men which reacts upon each constituent activity of the total economic order and revalues it in terms of its relations to the whole. This supreme synthesis, conceptually expressed, is God. Consequently, the cultivation of loyalty to God through worship, whereby individuals and groups may be prepared for creative participation in economic reconstruction, is the final position to which we are led in this investigation.

In the context of the economic problem, worship may be defined as that activity by which individuals and groups develop an attitude of readiness to search out the connections in any actual situation for the purpose of relating it to a more inclusive order of possibilities through loyalty to God whose presence is manifest in the growth of community in the world. It is devotion to the objective of supreme value by which all particular objectives and values are re-valued so that "our purposes are directed to ends which in our own consciousness are impartial as to our own interests;" and are so identified with the purposes of others that they "extend beyond values for ourselves to values for others," with a resulting appreciation of such value for others that it becomes "a value for ourselves."¹

In all true worship there are two basic presuppositions. First, and most important, there must be unreserved committal to God. The necessity for this committal is grounded in the logic by which our investigation leads us to the discovery that the paramount need in modern economic society is an adequate process of control. It is an outcome of the facts of the economic situation and is made explicit by an economist who has put the issue in this fashion: "Our ultimate concern is with the problem of social control, and with how to bring our methods of making a living into harmony with our conceptions of the ideal life."²

The second presupposition of worship is that which Professor W. E. Hocking has called the "principle of alternation." He says:

In all practical living we human beings are pursuing some total good under shapes and by means which are inadequate to it, and so partly false to it. . . . We begin to get in our own way and so defeat our own work. . . . We can find no radical remedy

¹ A. N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1926), p. 158.

² S. H. Slichter, *Modern Economic Society* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1931), p. 16.

except in getting rid of that self ; and no radical way of abandoning that self except by reverting to the whole.³

In the light of an examination of the economic order these words are eloquent indeed. For we see how intently men pursue their "total good" under the "shapes" of specific objectives which tend to exclude the true total that can confer upon them the true good. They get in their own way because these objectives in an interdependent world are self-contradictory ; and they get in the way of each other by striving for over-expanded functioning. This self, narrowed to the promotion of its own interests, brings the true work of life down to defeat. And there is "no way of abandoning that self except by reverting to the whole." In other words, only when the specific objective is brought under the normative guidance of the ultimate objective does it find deliverance from self-defeating particularity. Thus through worship men may discover and cultivate their connections with the more inclusive purposes of human living which are observable in the growth of community.

Assuming the unreserved committal to the supreme objective and the adoption of the principle of alternation, the experience of worship, as it affects the creative resolution of socio-economic conflict, may be analyzed into four principal steps. (1) Each of the opposing interests will examine the actual situation, each taking the rôle of the other and internalizing the conflict. (2) Each will examine the possibilities for that integration of their interests which will lead not only to a solution of the immediate problem but also provide for their growing together with other interests in the realization of further possibilities of community. (3) Each will examine the obstructions which stand in the way of integration and evaluate them under the guidance of the supreme objective. (4) Both, through loyalty to the supreme objective, will undertake co-operatively the work of reconstruction.

The activity of reconstruction proceeds as the validation of worship and the test of the efficacy of religion. Its characteristic is that co-operation of activities and union of purposes which not only bring a particular conflict to fruitful issue, but so shape the specific objectives of that issue that the way is left open for greater breadth of inclusiveness and future fulfilment. Worship carries on in the midst of the reconstructive activity providing clarity of vision and implementing the functioning of all through loyalty to God. Under these conditions

³ W. E. Hocking, *The Meaning of God In Human Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928), p. 410f. Used by permission of the publishers.

which religion may make available through worship, workers and employers, provided they are committed to the supreme objective of growth of community, may look upon each other through new eyes. For now one party does not see the other as an enemy in his own house, since the activity of each has been transformed by co-operatively undertaking a creative enterprise which subtracts nothing of value from either and adds a satisfactoriness to their purposes which neither could attain alone. Accepting their interdependence and the mutual reflexiveness of their activities, with all of the implications of living in organic community, they may now be bound together in a partnership which leads on to an ever-increasing security and opportunity for fulfilment.

Among the marginal problems which appear in connection with this thesis, and which in some measure help to disclose its significance, two of the more important may be mentioned. First, there arises the question of the relation of religion to the political order. Since political institutions represent attempts to control human activities through co-ordination, and manifest tendencies toward fixation, further study of the practical implications of our investigation would deal with the relevance of the various types of political organization and their competency to exercise control in a world of rapid change. An appraisal of democratic institutions and the functions of a League of Nations would undoubtedly occupy central consideration in such further exploration.

A second problem more immediately corollary to the present undertaking concerns the reconstruction which such a view of religion as we have presented would require in organized religion. Some of the implications of this problem have already appeared. But the most crucial difficulty flows from our discussion of the place of worship in the reconstruction of the economic order. Obviously the direct control of economic activities is at present in the hands of a small number of individuals and groups who, in so far as they have access to any religious motivation, continue in the traditional views which justify the separation of religion from a functional connection with the social order. This situation, in our perspective, calls for a progressive re-ordering of institutional religion. Such reconstruction is required if the specific objectives involved in human living are to undergo the transformation inherent in the growth of community, and if the relations of men are thus to pass from frustrative, destructive opposition to constructive, co-operative creation in an ever-ascending vocation of man.

